ALLERGY OVERVIEW

Allergies are diseases of the immune system that cause an overreaction to substances called "allergens." Allergies are grouped by the kind of trigger, time of year or where symptoms appear on the body: ***indoor*** and ***outdoor*** allergies (also called "hay fever," "seasonal," "perennial" or "nasal" allergies), ***food and drug*** allergies, ***latex*** allergies, ***insect*** allergies, ***skin*** allergies and ***eye*** allergies. People who have allergies can live healthy and active lives.

PREVENTION

There are some simple things you can do to prevent allergies at home, work school, outside and when you travel.

At Home.

- **Dust to control mites.** By dusting surfaces and washing bedding often, you can control the amount of dust mites in your home.
- **Vacuum often.** Although cleaning can sometimes trigger allergic reactions, with dust in the air, vacuuming once or twice a week will reduce the surface dust mites. Wear a mask when doing housework and consider leaving for a few hours after you clean to avoid allergens in the air. You can also make sure your vacuum has an air filter to capture dust.
- **Reduce pet dander.** If you have allergies, you should avoid pets with feathers or fur like birds, dogs and cats. Animal saliva and dead skin, or pet dander , can cause allergic reactions. If you can't bear to part with your pet, you should at least keep it out of the bedroom.
- **Shut out pollen.** When you clean your windows, do you see a film of pollen on the frame or sill? One easy way to prevent pollen from entering your home is to keep windows and doors closed. Use an air filter and clean it regularly or run the air conditioner and change the filter often.
- **Avoid mold spores.** Mold spores grow in moist areas. If you reduce the moisture in the bathroom and kitchen, you will reduce the mold. Fix any leaks inside and outside of your home and clean moldy surfaces. Plants can carry pollen and mold too, so limit the number of houseplants. Dehumidifiers will also help reduce mold.

At Work.

Allergies at home and work are similar and affect millions of people each year. Allergy symptoms, like sneezing, nasal congestion and headache, may make it difficult to concentrate. Every work environment will have specific allergy problems so talk to your health care provider or pharmacist about how you can prevent allergies at your specific workplace.

At School.

Children may face allergens in the classroom and playground. In fact, children in the United States miss about two million school days each year because of allergy symptoms. Parents, teachers and health care providers can work together to help prevent and treat childhood allergies. Monitor the classroom for plants, pets or other items that may carry allergens. Encourage your child to wash his/her hands after playing outside. Many of the allergens in thehome will also be found at school. Although it may not be an option to vacuum or dust the classroom, there may be treatment options to help a child manage his/her symptoms during the school day.

Outside.

There are certain times during the year when plants and trees release pollen into the air. The timing of these pollen seasons depends on your geographic location. Different regions have different types of plants that pollinate at different times. Depending on where you live, allergy seasons may be mild or severe. Experts estimate that 35 million Americans suffer from allergies because of airborne pollen!

Tiny particles that are released from trees, weeds and grasses are known as pollen. These particles are carried by the wind from tall treetops all the way to your nose. But before you shrug off fancy flowers in fear of sniffles, remember that the types of pollen that most commonly cause your allergies are from plain-looking plants, such as trees, grasses and weeds. These plants produce small and light pollen, perfect for catching a ride on a gentle breeze.

Similar to pollen, mold spores are a seasonal pest. If you are sensitive to mold spores, you may have symptoms from spring to late fall. Yet, even after the first frost of winter, some mold spores can continue to grow in freezing temperatures. The severity of your mold spore allergies can depend on the climate that you live in. In the warmest areas of the United States, mold spores grow all year! But before you move to Antarctica, remember that mold spores also grow indoors, making it a year-round problem.

Traveling.

We are all on the go and there are a few things to keep in mind to prevent outdoor allergies during peak season, when the pollen count is high.

- Stay inside during peak pollen times, usually between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.
- Keep your car windows closed when traveling
- Stay indoors when humidity is high and on days with high wind, when dust and pollen are more likely to be in the air
- Wear a facemask if you are outside to limit the amount of pollen you inhale
- Shower after spending time outside to wash away pollen that collects on your skin and hair

Planes, Trains and Automobiles.

If you suffer from allergies, there may be other concerns when you travel. The allergy climate may be different than the one where you live. When you travel by car, bus or train, you may find dust mites, mold spores and pollen bothersome. Turn on the air conditioner or heater before getting in your car and travel with the windows closed to avoid allergens from outside. Travel early in the morning or late in the evening when the air quality is better.

When flying to your favorite vacation spot, remember that air quality and dryness on planes can affect you if you have allergies. If a cruise is your next vacation, be aware of the season and temperature at your destination(s). In tropical, damp climates there are allergens like dust mites, mold spores and pollen. In cold, damp climates, you may be exposed to dust mites and mold spores. Once you arrive at your hotel, there may be dust mites and mold spores lurking. If you are staying with family or friends, the same types of allergens that you find at home may be present.

SOURCE: This information should not substitute for seeking responsible, professional medical care. First created 1995; fully updated 1998; most recently updated 2005.